

**Encouraging boys to read:  
a case study of a boys' independent school library.**

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# **Abstract**

## **Purpose**

To examine the role of the school library in encouraging Key Stage Three (KS3) boys to read fiction and to consider why this is important. There is a long tradition of investigating boys' reading habits but little research has been undertaken in a boys-only environment. The objectives were to undertake a case study of an independent boys' school library in order to:

- assess its role in the promotion and provision of fiction to KS3 boys
- examine what methods are used to encourage reading and what steps are taken to reduce barriers to reading
- to compare current practice with the literature and make recommendations accordingly

## **Methodology**

A qualitative case study was undertaken of an independent boys' school library. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposely selected "gatekeepers": librarians and teachers. The boys themselves were not interviewed for ethical reasons. The themes which emerged from the interview data were systematically analysed and conclusions drawn.

## **Results**

The case study found that boys are not naturally averse to reading but read less as they become older owing to negative perceptions of reading and the pressure of conflicting demands on their time. The act of choosing a book causes problems and boys are not aware of the services offered by the library to support them in their reading. The most important factor in encouraging boys is the creation of a culture of reading.

## **Conclusion**

The research revealed similar problems to those discussed in the literature but suggested different causes and consequently different solutions: these differences may be owing to socio-economic factors. The creation of a "reading culture" can only be achieved by significant adults adopting a role of support and encouragement and school librarians are ideally positioned to do so.

## Declaration and Statements

### DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

### STATEMENT 1

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where **\*correction services** have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged (e.g. by footnotes giving explicit references).

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## Abbreviations

<b>CILIP</b>	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
<b>IFLA</b>	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
<b>IASL</b>	International Association of School Librarianship
<b>KS3</b>	Key Stage Three
<b>ERCS</b>	Entry Reading Challenge
<b>SNIBS</b>	Shell Noses in Books Reading Challenge
<b>VLE</b>	Virtual Learning Environment

## Referencing Style

Harvard APA style has been used.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the Deputy Head of the school in which the interviews took place for his kind permission for me to use the school library as a case study.

I would like to thank those members of staff who agreed to give up their time to be interviewed and to share their views on the library. Thanks must also go to the Junior School Librarian for helping me to pilot the interview.

Special thanks must go to my family for their patience and encouragement.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of this research

Boys are generally perceived as being reluctant to read and this problem seems to worsen once they become teenagers. The National Reading Survey 2014 has recently confirmed this finding once more:

Boys tend to enjoy reading less, tend to read less often and think less positively about reading than girls. Similarly, older pupils tend to be more disengaged with reading in terms of enjoyment and attitudes when compared with younger pupils.

(Clarke, 2015, p17)

Why should this be? Why do boys simply fail to engage with reading for pleasure? Why do even keen readers tend to lose interest as they get older?

Attempting to find answers to these questions is the main purpose behind this dissertation: more specifically, this research aims to investigate the role of the school library in addressing these problems. Although there is a long tradition of investigating reading, it is a tradition worth continuing as it is a problem which is evidently not yet resolved. What differentiates this study from what has gone before is that few studies have looked specifically at a boys-only school library. School librarians are in a unique position. In no other sphere of library work is there the same possibility to work closely with young people and nurture their reading habits; public libraries do life-changing, often highly-



undervalued work with young people but the crucial difference with a school library is in the nature of the library users. Public libraries are dependent on a child choosing to visit the library; school libraries have a captive audience. This privileged position gives the librarian the opportunity to nurture a true love of reading for pleasure in their pupils. Some may see this as the role of the English department but reading for pleasure and the academic study of literature are completely different things – indeed there is endless anecdotal evidence of children being completely disillusioned with reading owing to their experiences in English classes. Encouraging children to read for pleasure

is about developing readers who love reading and continually working towards a culture of reading for pleasure within the school in a way that is very different to the experience of exploring a set text in a classroom.

(CILIP Guidelines, 2014, p.2).

Reading for pleasure is a vital life skill – it “contributes to an individual’s quality of life” (Boelens, 2012, p.3) and school librarians are ideally placed to help boys develop a love for reading.

## **1.2 Aims and objectives**

The difficulty of encouraging boys to read is not a new problem. Therefore, in order to effectively investigate this issue, a purposive reading of the literature on the subject was undertaken, as detailed in chapter two, which led to the development of the following research questions:

- How should the school library encourage Key Stage Three (KS3) boys to read fiction?
- Why is this important?
- What barriers exist to prevent Key Stage Three boys from reading fiction?

The decision was taken to focus the study on the reading habits of KS3 boys, that is, boys aged between eleven and fourteen, corresponding to school years seven to nine. This is because the literature suggests that this is the age at which boys tend to lose interest in reading.

The following aims and objectives were then set in order to answer these questions:

Aim: To examine the role of the school library in encouraging boys to read fiction and consider why this is important.

Objectives:

- To undertake a case study of an independent boys' school library to assess its role in the promotion and provision of fiction to KS3 boys.
- To examine what methods are used to encourage reading and what steps are taken to reduce barriers to reading.
- To compare current practice with the literature and make recommendations based off the findings of the case study.

### **1.3 Structure of the dissertation**

- **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter explains the purpose behind the research; how the research questions were formulated; what aims and objectives were set; the structure of the dissertation.

- **Chapter Two: Literature review**

A purposive review of the literature was undertaken to establish the current state of research on this topic. Given the wealth of research on this topic, only research published since 2000 was reviewed unless it was regularly cited in later literature and therefore regarded to be particularly relevant or important. The literature review suggested three main areas for consideration: attitude to reading, access to fiction and promotion of fiction.

- **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Qualitative methods were deemed most suitable for this research and this chapter clearly justifies the reasons for this and explains the case study methodology used. Each stage of the methodology is explained: data collection; ethical considerations; interviewing; analysis. Limitations of this methodology and suggestions for its improvement are also discussed.

- **Chapter Four: Findings**

The findings of the case study are explained in detail with extensive quotations from the interviews. The themes identified in the literature review are found to be relevant to the library studied, but with some key differences.

- **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The findings of the case study are discussed and compared with the existing literature on the subject. The similarities and differences are compared and discussed and possible reasons for these are suggested.

- **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

The conclusion considers whether the aims and objectives have been met and the research questions answered. The effectiveness of the whole research project is reviewed and suggestions are made as to how it could be improved. Suggestions are made for extending this research further. Finally, using the evidence from the case study, recommendations are given as to how best to encourage boys to read fiction for pleasure.

## **1.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of this research is to continue a long tradition of researching how young people can be encouraged to read fiction for

pleasure. While there is a wealth of literature discussing the role of the school library, as will be seen in chapter two, very little of that literature is gender-specific. This research aims to add to the body of literature on the subject from a gender-specific perspective by focussing specifically on KS3 boys and investigating the role of the school library in encouraging them to read.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this literature review is firstly to consider why it is important to develop a love of reading for pleasure in KS3 boys. Secondly to consider what methods are recommended for librarians to encourage KS3 boys to read fiction. The review will then investigate what barriers exist to prevent KS3 boys from reading fiction and the methods recommended to overcome these barriers. Finally the review will consider what this study can add to the body of knowledge on this area.

### **2.2 Scope of the Literature Review**

In searching the literature it was not possible to undertake an exhaustive review. Firstly, it was not always possible to obtain access to certain articles. Research was limited to items either available either online or in print from Aberystwyth University Information Services or freely available on the internet. A small number of items were also available in print form at the researcher's workplace. Secondly, time was a restraining factor: searches could produce thousands of items.

Searches were done on PRIMO, Library and Information Science Abstracts (Proquest) and Library and Information Technology Abstracts (EBSCO) provided by Aberystwyth University Information Services.

Searches were also done using the Sage publications search facility

provided to members by the Chartered institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). After the initial searches had been conducted, certain publications were seen to be cited regularly and were purposely searched. Bibliographies of useful articles were examined for references to follow up.

School libraries	Reading promotion	Reading for pleasure	Reading
Boys	School	Fiction	e-books
Search terms used – individually and in combination			

Table 1: Search terms

As stated, searching provided thousands of results. The intention was to do a purposive review for recently published items specifically relevant to the topic. Time constraints meant that items containing only minimal reference to the topic were discarded as was anything about one-off reading initiatives – this study is to investigate ongoing practical strategies. Narrowing of search terms, influenced by the initial scan of the articles found, reduced the numbers significantly but further reduction was required. The decision was taken to exclude items not written in English and to predominantly consider items published after 2000 unless they were especially relevant or were repeatedly cited in the later literature. Searches took place in November 2014 so more recent literature may not have been considered.

## 2.3 Why encourage reading for pleasure?

It is a simplistic but valid point that school librarians should promote reading for pleasure because it is a requirement of the job. The guidelines from the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) state that

The librarian should also stimulate interest in reading and organise reading promotion programmes in order to develop the appreciation of literature.

(IFLA Guidelines, 2002, p.20)

The International Association of School Librarianship proposes that “Promoting literacy (on all platforms)” (Boelens, 2012, p.3) is a basic requirement of a school library and that

the school library assists with literacy development and promotes the concept of reading as a pleasurable, voluntary activity.

(p.3)

These expectations are reiterated at national level. One of the key CILIP recommendations for secondary school librarians is that

the librarian plays a lead role in developing a whole-school reading culture, promoting literacy and reading for pleasure.

(Shaper, 2014, p.61)

Similar statements are made by other national library associations (e.g. The American Library Association).

Why is it seen as so important for school librarians to encourage reading for pleasure? School libraries are integral parts of the schools in which



they operate and their role is closely linked to the teaching and learning aims of that school. The IFLA guidelines clearly state that

There is a direct link between reading level and learning results.  
(IFLA Guidelines, 2002, p.21)

Reading for pleasure and learning are not mutually exclusive – the former complements the latter. As Sullivan and Brown (2013) found:

Reading for pleasure had a powerful influence on children's cognitive development.  
(p.2)

Their study investigates the effects of four variables on the intellectual development of children during their teenage years and includes the question

Which factors are linked to changing test scores between the ages of 10 and 16? In particular, is the child's own reading linked to cognitive progress?  
(p.5)

They find that

reading is actually linked to increased cognitive progress over time  
(p.37)

and that it has a greater effect on intellectual progress than any other factor. Their study examined data from tests taken at age 16 by members of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) and includes results from 5979 people, all born in the same week in 1970. These cognitive advantages extend into middle age – the same cohort resat the

vocabulary test taken in 1986 again in 2012 at age 42. The scores suggested that

Childhood reading habits exerted a long-term influence on adult vocabulary development, even controlling for adult reading habits  
(Sullivan & Brown, 2014, p.5)

and that

reading for pleasure both in childhood and adulthood have a continued link to progress.  
(p.5)

The person best placed within the school to encourage that necessary reading is the school librarian. As Tilke (2002) suggests,

of course schools teach reading. They support and encourage reading. Encouraging *readers* is perhaps the next logical step. As this can only be really developed on an individual basis, there is potential for a firm and individual role for a school library.  
(p.186)

## **2.4 How should reading for pleasure be encouraged?**

If it is the role of the school library to encourage reading for pleasure, the crucial question must be how to do so? This is not a straightforward question and it is important for this piece of research to ensure that the methods chosen must be tailored to boys. There is a clear gender divide in reading habits and this case study is of a boys' school library – teenage boys are widely regarded as being reluctant readers. In the 2013 National Literacy Trust annual survey into Children's and Young People's Reading, Clark (2014) notes that

nearly twice as many boys as girls say that they don't enjoy reading at all (12.9% vs. 7.1%)

(p.12)

and that a “divisive factor continues to be age” (p.13). The study also finds that the percentage of children who enjoy reading decreases the older they get (p.13).

What then are the best ways to encourage boys to read and what barriers exist to prevent them reading? The literature on the subject raises various issues summarised by three main themes: attitude to reading, access to reading and promotion of reading.

#### **2.4.1 Attitude**

The first problem to be overcome is that of boys' attitude to reading. Lancaster (2012) conducts an annual survey of all year seven pupils at his school and suggests that attitude is critical. He grades their attitude to reading on a 1-4 scale and finds that students with a high reading age can still have an “unsatisfactory” (p.4) attitude to reading if they read only rarely and see themselves as “a weak reader” (p.4). His research has found that

if a student has a high reading age...and they have a negative attitude towards reading they will not read regularly.

(p.4)

The survey data, when combined with other available tracking data, indicate which students need intervention; a major component of these

interventions involve trying to make students see reading as fun by the use of technology or by encouraging them to read graphic novels. Sullivan (2009, p.99) argues that boys are not illiterate, but alliterate and suggests making the library more anarchic to attract boys and to “differentiate it from the classroom” (p.80). Similarly, Coles and Hall (1999, p.87), interpreting survey results from nearly 8000 children across Britain together with follow-up discussions with children and teachers, suggest that many boys associate reading with studying and analysing books in English lessons which calls for an emotional response to literature. They suggest that this puts boys off reading as it is the “antithesis of being stylish” (p.87) to most boys and also makes them very uncomfortable. They also suggest that boys believe their preferred choice of reading materials to be “not valued in school” (p.88). Sullivan (2009) makes a similar point suggesting that when boys are asked how much they read, they are translating the question into,

How much of what we consider reading are you reading?  
(p.17)

and are not including the many different things that they do read e.g. comics or gaming manuals. Boltz (2007) suggests that

Boys want books about motorcycles and cars, snakes and sports, dinosaurs and the military. The illustrations are important, as are the book jackets; they have to look good to be “cool”.  
(p.2)

Using Rosenblatt’s 1995 comparison of “aesthetic” and “efferent” readers, Boltz (p.3) argues that classroom reading tends to be

“aesthetic” i.e. looking at a work’s literary quality, whereas, by contrast, boys tend to be efferent readers i.e. they are reading for a purpose.

Faced with the challenge of breaking down reluctant teenage boys’ negative attitude towards reading, the literature makes various suggestions. Lancaster (2012, p.7) advises active interventions such as the use of technology (e.g. kindles) and structured reading targets. This may be effective but very labour-intensive. Boltz (2007) suggests embracing boys’ reading habits and encouraging them to read anything -

They will read...and are generally enthusiastic if given the opportunity to select their own materials

(p.16)

an idea that supports Sullivan’s suggestion that reading for pleasure be differentiated from classroom learning. Cota (1996, p.3) recommends that staff be seen reading “easy” books so as not to discourage struggling readers and stocking whatever children actually want to read. This is however only the start of the problem. Having convinced boys both that they can read and that reading is worthwhile, the challenge is to actually get them reading in practice. The literature discussed above has suggested that boys and girls differ both in why they read and what they choose to read, however, none have proposed gender-specific strategies to encourage boys. Therefore an investigation of a successful boys’ school library could prove useful by helping to increase understanding about what strategies actually work with boys.

### **2.4.2 Access**

Boys will only read if they have access to reading materials and access is yet another barrier to reading for teenage boys which can take many forms.

An obvious yet often overlooked barrier to access to reading must be that of library opening hours. By surveying pupils at four London schools, Spiller and Spreadbury (1999, p.10) found that the majority would prefer their school libraries to be open longer which would allow greater access to books. Similar findings are reported by Shenton and Dixon (2002), Bates (2000) and La Marca (2005). While Dickinson, Gavigan and Pribesh (2008, p.7) found no clear link between opening hours and circulation figures, they suggest that it is an area worth further study. Despite the lack of evidence that reduced opening hours reduce circulation, the fact the pupils see opening hours as an issue makes it barrier in their eyes.

Once in the library pupils face barriers to finding the materials they want to read. How do they find books? There are three choices: to search the catalogue, browse the shelves or ask a librarian.

Druin (2005, p.21) argues that, although children are heavy users of technology, their needs are rarely considered in the development of new

technology. This would support professional experience that school children often find library catalogues baffling. Druin suggests that children are highly visual learners and that colour, images and graphic features create a much greater impact (pp. 23-24). Many library catalogues are not so designed. Even when the catalogue is “child-friendly” it is still a barrier between the child and the book: how does the number on the screen relate to a position on a shelf? Hembree (2013, p.62) reports pupils leaving the library without a book because it is easier than negotiating the catalogue. She suggests that those easily put off tend to be the more reluctant readers; her evidence is largely anecdotal but experience suggests it to be a familiar story to many school librarians.

Browsing the shelves may seem the simpler option to many children. However, this is not straightforward: how are the books arranged?

Children simply want materials ‘shelved together that make sense’.

(Meyer, 1999, quoted by Druin, 2005, p.23)

Kinnell (1991) describes shelving fiction alphabetically by author as “the time-honoured method” (p.107) but found from surveying adult users of Kent libraries that significantly more users searched for fiction by genre than by author (p.104). This supports Ainley & Totterdell’s findings that stock categorisation increases borrowing figures (1982, p.134). Their research was based on adult readers but the same is likely to be true of

children. Kaplan (2013) concluded from discussions with students and librarians that

Models of organizing fiction by genre, series and reading levels are effective and work well with the way children (or even adults) look for fiction.

(p.46)

Proof of this can be found in Moreillon, Hunt and Graves' (2013) research at Wedgwood Middle School library (USA) where the fiction circulation figures "soared from 7,569...to 16,024" (p.41) in twelve months as a result of "genre-fying". Sweeney (2013, p.45) found from student observation that borrowing by reluctant readers has increased due to genre-fying the fiction and that students are more engaged with the collection e.g. holding impromptu book discussions. Despite the strong case for shelving fiction by genre, it is fraught with difficulties. Shenton (2006, pp.130-1) makes the point that while no-one asks by author surname, matching genres to what children ask for is not straightforward and some books may not clearly fit a single genre. Each librarian must decide what best suits their users.

The library staff are the obvious source for help in finding a book – or so it may seem to professionals but maybe not to the children. Librarians can have a less than flattering image. Shenton and Dixon's (2002) study of children's attitudes to their school library found that some pupils find their library to have a "negative ambience" (p.178) where "they tell you off" (p.178) and to be "less accessible than the local public library"



(p.178). Randall (2013) researched how young adults choose fiction in public libraries and discovered very negative attitudes towards library staff. She describes the reaction of her focus group as “confused faces” (p.20) when asked about their use of library customer services. The same negativity extends to interaction with library social media sites – teenagers are aware they exist but are very reluctant to interact with them. Randall stresses the importance of “close, personal relationships” (p.20) with teenage readers; this is arguably easier in a school setting and vital – Bates (2000) concludes that

the personality of a school librarian clearly plays a part in  
establishing a positive image of the library

(p.167)

and Cota (1996) argues that

the library staff's attitude toward the students is tied to whether a  
student will enjoy coming to the library and will then grow to love  
reading.

(p.3)

Good relationships with students will help to encourage students to read but in order to be able find the right book for the right child at the right time, librarians need to be experts in children’s books and need to read themselves. Perry (2013, p.49) surveyed school librarians to see if there was a link between the number of children’s books a librarian reads and the amount of reading encouragement they provide to students and concluded that the two were closely linked.

This all pre-supposes that the desired book is actually on the shelves.

The librarian is ultimately responsible for stock selection and this is influenced by their attitude to children's reading choices. It is a matter of decision-making, informed by policy that is based on their attitudes about what a library should be (La Marca, 2005, p.96). Bates' (2000) case study of three UK secondary school libraries recommends that

pupils should be canvassed for their needs and preferences regarding library services and acquisitions on a regular basis.  
(p.174)

If librarians stock what children want to read they are more likely to become keen readers.

Another means to access quality reading materials is e-books. There is an increasing amount of literature concerned with how best to provide e-books in libraries but while some have suggested using e-books to encourage reluctant readers (e.g. Lancaster, 2012, p.7), there would appear to be little written on whether children actually want e-books to be available via the school library.

These access issues are doubtless true of both genders, but to different extents. Gender-specific research will help to highlight which access issues affect boys the most.

### 2.4.3 Promotion

Having persuaded boys that reading is acceptable and provided them with the materials they want to read, the next step is promotion. The literature suggests that this too is heavily dependent on the attitude of librarians. As already discussed, librarians must make reading for pleasure quite different from English lessons. Librarians need to actively promote the library as a pleasant place to read and encourage children to visit. La Marca (2005) argues that the ambience of the library is vital:

we must consider how our attitude impacts upon the environment, the type of ambience we have created and the level of access we have made possible.

(p.107)

While one-off reading initiatives will inevitably get children in the library temporarily, promotion of the library should be ongoing. Only when children visit regularly will they form that rapport, the “close, personal relationships” proposed by Randall (2013, p.20), that give librarians the chance to encourage children to try reading new things.

Common suggested promotional methods recommended in the literature include using library displays, author visits, book reviews etc. (e.g. Bates 2000, pp.163-165). Bates (2014, p.70-71) and Galliton (2014, p.63) both recommend ongoing reading schemes with incentives if necessary. It could be argued that everything a librarian does is promotion in some way. A rapidly developing area is social media. Although Randall (2013, pp.20-21) found young people reluctant to interact with library

social media sites, Bates (2014, pp.70-71) found that basing an ongoing reading scheme around a dedicated twitter hashtag increased participation. Are there any other ways to encourage children to interact with library social media? Do boys react differently than girls to certain promotional methods? A study of a boys-only library may help to show what works best for boys.

## **2.5 This study**

There is clearly a long tradition of encouraging reading for pleasure and the literature shows that there is a particular need to encourage boys. Many issues to investigate have been discovered. While there is literature concerned specifically with why boys don't read, most of the suggested solutions result from research undertaken in mixed school settings. A study of a boys-only school library would therefore be beneficial. This study aims to investigate the issues suggested by the review and see how relevant they are in practice.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Case study methodology

In determining the best methodology for this study the research questions were used as a guide –

the choice of research method should be determined by the research question and research context, and not the other way around

(Ellis et al., 2010, Unit 3, p.13).

The aim of this study is to examine the role of the school library in encouraging KS3 boys to read fiction by researching what methods of encouragement can be used and what barriers exist to prevent them from reading. There is no pre-conceived hypothesis to test, the aim is to delve deeper into this specific phenomenon and examine the reasons behind it. It is therefore inductive in nature, that is, the theory is generated from the research –

the knowledge collected in context helps create theory.

(Cibangu, 2013, p.197)

There are various methods by which to research particular phenomena and Bryman (2012) suggests investigating a “representative or typical case” (p.70) i.e. doing a qualitative case study. This method of research fits well with the nature of the research questions to be answered and was also manageable within the researcher’s time and financial restraints. Yin (1994) describes a case study as

an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context.

(p.13)

This study aims to investigate the contemporary issue of boys' reading habits in a real life library.

The “case” under investigation is a school library. Pickard (2013) describes the “case” as “a vehicle in which to study it” [a phenomenon] (p.102). The specific school library being studied here represents a typical school library, Bryman's “representative or typical case” (p.70), and is an ideal “vehicle” by which to investigate the issue of boys' reading. Patton (1990) suggests that

case studies...become particularly useful when one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth

(p.54)

and that

a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question.

(p.54)

In this study, the special people are KS3 boys and the particular problem would be how to encourage them to read fiction. He goes on to quote Stake's (1981) opinion that case studies can

provide more valid portrayals, better bases for personal understanding of what is going on, and solid grounds for considering action.

(Stake, quoted by Patton, 1990, p.54)

This study aims to discover such rich data in order to provide better understanding of the issue.

Patton (1990) suggests that

case studies have become a mainstay of educational research and evaluation.

(p.99)

This has become evident from the review of the literature on this topic.

Bates (2000) and La Marca (2005) both use case study methodology to investigate the issue of reading and school libraries and other researchers have included case studies as part of their research into the same issue e.g. Lancaster (2012).

Having established a case study to be a suitable vehicle by which to undertake the research the research was carefully planned. A common criticism of qualitative research is its subjective nature and the fact that the results cannot easily be generalised. However,

case studies are not intended to produce generalizations, they are intended to allow for transferability of findings based on contextual applicability.

(Pickard, 2013, p.109)

A case study investigates a particular phenomenon in context. The important factor is to ensure that the methodology used is clearly documented so another researcher could repeat the study. Yin (1994)

recommends making “as many steps as possible operational” (p.36) and a clear plan of how the research was undertaken does precisely this.

### **3.2 Data collection**

Various methods of data collection have been used to research the issue of teenage reading habits. Surveys and questionnaires can be used as a case study data collection method. For example Buckingham (2002) used questionnaires to investigate a similar issue. Crucially, however, Buckingham found that the data

has not identified why there is a dramatic decrease in children's reading.  
(p.13)

Even with a carefully designed open-ended questionnaire or survey, the opportunity to dig deeper and establish “why” is not available. Focus groups have also been used successfully (e.g. Randall, 2013) but were rejected as not being a suitable method to generate the in-depth data sought from such a small case.

Pickard (2013, p.105) and Bryman (2012, p.68) both suggest interviews. Interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to dig deep into a subject :

interviews are usually used when we are seeking qualitative, descriptive, in-depth data.  
(Pickard, 2013, p.196)



They offer the opportunity of “‘rambling’ or going off at tangents” (Bryman, 2012, p.470) – a chance to get a deeper insight into the interviewee's thoughts. Following the example of Bates (2000, p.155), semi-structured interviews were used in order to allow interviewees the opportunity to give rich, detailed responses. Semi-structured interviews were seen as preferable to completely unstructured interviews as a semi-structure ensures that all interviewees are questioned on the same core topics, while giving the flexibility to digress where necessary.

The decision about who to interview was influenced by ethical considerations. Although the aim of this study is to examine the reading habits of boys, ethical considerations meant that the decision was made not to approach boys directly owing to the difficulties surrounding gaining informed consent from minors. Although it should be possible to design the study in such a way as to comply with legal and ethical regulations with regard to minors, the time taken to obtain the necessary permissions would have taken too long to be feasible. It was therefore decided to follow the advice from the Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University and to interview “gatekeepers” i.e. librarians and teachers. Although some have interviewed children (e.g. Wilson, 2009, p.46) or surveyed children (e.g. Shenton, 2007, p.33-35), researching school libraries by approaching key adults is not uncommon (e.g. Bates, 2000, p.158 and Moreillon, Hunt & Graves, 2013, p.40). As seen from the literature review, a number of barriers exist to prevent KS3 boys from reading. The key person(s) responsible for removing or easing those

barriers are the library staff, not the pupils. This study aims to research those barriers and therefore the staff – the “gatekeepers” to the books - are appropriate units of analysis.

Sampling methods were not used to choose the adults to interview: the interviewees were purposely chosen as being “individuals or groups who fit the bill” (Greenhalgh, 1997a, p.741). The school library staff were the obvious individuals to approach – the “key informants” (Pickard, 2013, p.104). However, in order to provide data from a different perspective, the Head of English and Head of Learning Support were also approached for interview. Interviewing people from different parts of the organisation can help to provide further insight into the case by looking at it from a different angle. It also can be seen as a form of triangulation and improves the study’s credibility (Bryman, 2012, p.390-392). Patton (1990, p.467) suggests that comparing the perspectives of people with different points of view can strengthen the study’s validity and suggests that “the point is to study and understand why there are differences”.

The decision to interview the Heads of English and Learning Support was influenced by the literature. A key theme to explore is the difference between reading for English lessons and reading for pleasure and it was hoped that the Head of English could shed light on this theme. There is precedence for this: both Bates (2000) and Shenton (2007) have utilized English teachers. The Learning Support department shares many of the aims of both the Library and the English department in that they are actively involved in encouraging boys to read but crucially, neither

teaching English nor encouraging reading for pleasure are their main focus; the Head of Learning Support was therefore interviewed in order to provide an informed 'outsider's' view on the work and role of the library and its interaction with the English department.

### **3.3 Ethical considerations**

To ensure that the research was conducted ethically, *Aberystwyth University Research Ethics Guidance Notes* and *DIS Ethics Policy for research* were followed. The school in which the research was conducted had no ethics policy so the British Educational Research Association (BERA) *Ethical guidelines for educational research* (2011) were also followed.

Before starting the research the permission of the host school was sought. Permission was granted subject to maintaining complete anonymity. Therefore, neither the school nor the interviewees are named in the interview transcripts or recordings, but are referred to simply by numbers and job titles. Guidelines from the Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University were used to design letters of introduction from the researcher together with consent forms. In order to ensure that participants had all the information necessary to give informed consent the consent forms detailed the research aims and process. Details of how the data would be recorded, stored and used were explained and participants were given the option to withdraw at any time in the process.

All research data was stored independently on two duplicate USB sticks, (two sticks in case one became damaged.) This was to ensure that the data was kept confidential. Both were kept secure and the data destroyed after a suitable length of time. It was hoped that, having received assurances of complete anonymity and confidentiality, participants would feel comfortable with providing the fullest information possible.

### **3.4 Interviewing and Analysis**

The interviews for this case study took place between March and June 2015. Semi-structured interviews were used aided by an interview guide (see appendix three). The literature review yielded a number of issues to examine and these were used as the starting structure for the interview guide. Open-ended questions were devised in order to elicit detailed responses. Interviewees were asked about their experiences in trying to encourage boys to read and what they saw as the main barriers preventing boys from reading. These were followed by questions regarding the role of the library and library staff in encouraging boys to read. In order to test the suitability of the questions, the interview guide was then piloted by a practice interview with the Junior School Librarian. This was a vital stage of the research as it provided the opportunity to practice interviewing and recording. Most importantly, while the pilot interview successfully generated the expected type of data, the responses given by the Junior School Librarian indicated where some questions needed revising and what additions and omissions were

needed. For example, a question asking about multiple potential barriers to finding books was found to be too long and complicated; it was thus broken down into a series of short, similar questions that proved to be less confusing. This revised interview guide was then used for the actual interviews. The guide was reviewed after each interview in order to incorporate any emergent ideas into subsequent interviews, as recommended by Pickard (2013, p.107). The interviews were recorded and notes were also taken to aid the researcher to identify areas to follow up before ending the interview. Interviews were reviewed for new emergent themes immediately afterwards and transcribed as soon as was possible in preparation for analysis.

Qualitative analysis is less straightforward than quantitative analysis. The very nature of qualitative research can result in a large body of unstructured data from which theory may be generated. However, it is important to use a clear method for analysis if possible. Greenhalgh (1997a) recommends that

The researcher must find a systematic way of analysing his or her data.  
(p.742)

This strengthens the study's validity because it allows another researcher to repeat the analysis, even if different conclusions are ultimately drawn. Because the subjective nature of qualitative research means that no two researchers would necessarily draw the same conclusions from the data, Greenhalgh (1997a) suggests that

it is therefore necessary, when assessing the validity of qualitative research, to ask whether the interpretation placed on the data accords with common sense.

(p.742)

In order to analyse the data, Yin (1994) recommends following the “theoretical propositions that led to the case study” which “presumably were based on ... reviews of the literature” (p.103). Both Bryman (2012, p.578-581) and Patton (1990, p.376) suggest analysing the data using a simplified form of coding based off the themes found in the data. This was undertaken by following La Marca's (2005, p.90) example of using the themes which emerged from the literature to form the basis both for the interview guide and subsequently the framework for the analysis. However, the transcripts were first closely examined to establish whether these themes had proved to be relevant to this case and whether any further themes had emerged from the research. An example of this was that the broad issue of boys' attitude to reading needed to be broken down into more detailed categories. The themes to be used for analysis were allocated codes, using alphabetical prefixes to indicate into which of the three overarching categories highlighted in the literature review they fitted: A = Attitude; AC = Access; P = Promotion. The transcripts were then re-read closely and the responses annotated with any codes deemed relevant. Once these had all been systematically collated into a spreadsheet, the resulting document provided the researcher with a clear series of tables, each headed by a theme, below which was listed every response relevant to that theme, cross-referenced with the identification number of the interviewee and

the question from which that response had resulted. The answers to the various questions could then be compared and contrasted both with each other and with the literature. The resulting conclusions were drawn from careful comparison and analysis of the data.

### **3.5 Limitations of this methodological approach**

This case study was, of necessity, comparatively small in nature. Only four people were interviewed; thus meaning that only a small number of views were taken into account. However, the benefits of this were two-fold: firstly, despite the small number of interviewees, the quantity of data generated was considerable, yet manageable. Conducting more interviews would possibly have generated more data than could be managed within the researcher's time-frame. Secondly, the numbers of interviewees were evenly balanced between library staff and non-library staff. Interviewing non-library staff proved extremely valuable as their views differed quite markedly in places from those of the library staff and gave real insight into the areas where the library possibly needs to develop. However, it would not be possible to interview more than two library staff as the library has a staff of three (the researcher being the third) so interviewing the same number of non-library staff would seem to give a fair balance of views.

As stated, the researcher works in the library studied. This obviously leads to a risk of bias on the part of the researcher. Every effort was made to avoid opportunities for the researcher's own views to affect the

research: the methodology was systematic, clearly planned and fully documented so that another researcher could replicate the research. However, there remains the risk of researcher bias which could have been avoided by investigating a different library.

The most obvious limitation of the research was that the boys themselves were not interviewed. As explained above, this was owing to the researcher's time constraints as obtaining the necessary ethical approval would have considerably lengthened the time needed for the study. However, there is a solid tradition of researching issues concerning minors by means of gatekeepers and interviewing adults, particularly the non-librarians, was found to have the benefit of providing data about the school-wide perception of the library that might not have been obtained from interviewing the boys themselves.

### **3.6 Methods summary**

The aim of this research was to examine the role of the school library in encouraging KS3 boys to read fiction by researching what methods of encouragement can be used and what barriers exist to prevent them from reading. Qualitative research methods were chosen as the best way to investigate this issue. The use of a case study proved effective: a considerable quantity of rich data was generated, the analysis of which has provided a clear insight into the issue. Although there are some limitations to this research, noted above, these were unavoidable within



the researcher's time constraints. Semi-structured interviews proved to be an effective way to generate useful, relevant data but with the flexibility to tailor the interview to follow up key points where necessary. The transcription and analysis of the data was extremely time-consuming but the limitations on the number of interviewees kept this manageable. The writing of a detailed research plan proved an invaluable stage in the research as it required the researcher to think through the project carefully in advance and so prevent potential pitfalls. Similarly, the systematic collation of responses into a detailed spreadsheet, while time-consuming, made subsequent analysis much more straightforward. The results of that analysis can be seen in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The aim of this research was to examine the role of the school library in encouraging boys to read fiction and consider why this is important.

This was done by means of a case study to assess the role of a specific school library in the promotion and provision of fiction to KS3 boys.

Using the data collection and analysis methods explained in chapter three, the findings were as follows:

### **4.1 Attitude**

#### **4.1.1 Boys' attitude towards reading**

Negative attitudes towards reading were seen to be a barrier to reading.

This was not simply the attitude of the boys themselves but how they are perceived to be affected by the attitudes of others. All interviewees were of the opinion that boys can be reluctant to read but there were differences of opinion as to the cause. Only one interviewee mentioned physical problems (e.g. dyslexia). The main findings were found to be as follows:

- **Age**

Age was seen as a prime cause for boys' reluctance to read – specifically that boys tend to be more reluctant the older they get. The common consensus was that boys quite enjoy reading until external factors begin to have an impact. Year nine was seen to be the crucial age boys can start to lose their interest in reading:

*“it seems to be at particular ages that boys might seem to lose a bit of their interest in reading...about fourteen onwards I think”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“in my experience, boys in years seven and eight are voracious readers but they become a little inhibited or distracted when they come to year nine”*  
(Interviewee 4)

- **Competing demands**

Even if boys are keen readers, interviewees felt that other activities can prevent boys from reading. Increase in academic workload was seen as an issue and tends to occur in year nine, neatly corresponding with the observations about age (above). It was suggested that other activities such as sport or online activities are perceived by boys to be more attractive than reading.

*“a lot of boys might prefer just to be outside playing football rather than in with a book. There's so many other pursuits these days, social networking, computer games, lots of things that might grab their interest a bit more than reading”*  
(Interviewee 2)

- **Image**

A biggest problem is seen to be the perception boys have of reading as an activity. The words “cool” and “uncool” were used frequently by interviewees:

*“reading might be associated with being uncool”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“reading isn't cool”*  
(Interviewee 3)

*“reading can sometimes be associated with maybe nerdy behaviour that isn't in line with being sort of cool”*  
(Interviewee 4)

This was linked to peer pressure – boys want to look “cool” in front of their friends:

*“if it becomes seen as a girl thing, then, because they want to define themselves as boys with their pals, part of defining yourself as a boy equals don't read, then it can become something that they're not going to do”*  
(Interviewee 3)

*“feelings of self-consciousness of how they are perceived by their peers”*  
(Interviewee 4)

Conversely, it was felt that if boys come from a culture where reading is accepted as a normal thing to do, these pressures are lessened:

*“I think that if they are in a culture where reading is the norm, it's cool, it's OK, then I think they will read”*  
(Interviewee 3)

*“family history of reading can have a big input into whether a boy is reluctant or not with reading”*  
(Interviewee 2)

#### **4.1.2 Boys' perception of reading**

Boys' attitude is seen to be influenced by their perception of reading.

The view of the Head of English contrasted markedly with the other interviewees. When asked what constituted “proper reading” the other

interviewees felt that the important thing was that boys were actually reading and that anything was OK so long as boys were reading something.

*“The default position is that I don't care...my job is to expose students to quality writing but if the one book to get someone reading is not 'quality writing' it's a start and will support and encourage them in their reading. The aim is to broaden them”*  
(Interviewee 1)

*“just encouraging them to read whatever grabs their interest I'd say is the most important thing.”*  
(Interviewee 2)

While the Head of English explains how important it is to encourage boys to read anything – not simply 'literary' books:

*“I've always stressed the importance of looking kind of beyond that relatively sort of narrow understanding of what's valuable and understanding, appreciating that there are lots of forms of reading”*  
(Interviewee 4)

examples of these “forms of reading” are given as

*“good quality reports of football matches or sports or good magazines about those sports, autobiographies, even if ghost-written”*  
(Interviewee 4)

which are clearly expected to be of a certain literary standard, unlike the

*“latest footy magazines”*  
(Interviewee 3)

*“graphic novels”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“comic book”*  
(Interviewee 2)

proposed by the other interviewees.

While all interviewees suggested that studying English *should* be enjoyable, all except the Head of English suggested that this was not always the case. The Head of English said that

*“I don't see that there should be a difference”*  
(Interviewee 4)

between studying English and reading for pleasure, arguing that they study a wide variety of texts and aim to choose ones that would be popular with the boys. However, other interviewees pointed out that there was a key difference between studying English and reading for pleasure - choice:

*“In English they have to read prescribed texts. Its all very useful...However, reading for pleasure is self-selecting”*  
(Interviewee 1)

*“Often in English lessons they might just be looking at a particular few pages of a text. Which doesn't really get them involved in the book and I think that can be, sometimes, a bit of a turn-off for boys”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“I suppose one hopes that the reading for English lessons is pleasurable but I suppose I think the idea is that you have a book on the go and it's your choice, whereas in English you've probably been told to 'read the next three chapters of book X'. So the reading for pleasure is less directed and more exploratory perhaps”*  
(Interviewee 3)

If boys enjoy their English reading, then interviewees believed they will also read for pleasure. However, if their experience of English was less positive, it could prevent them from choosing to read for pleasure, particularly if they didn't feel they were good at English.

#### **4.1.3 Effect of other people on boys' attitude towards reading**

Despite suggesting that their experience of English lessons *might* deter boys from reading for pleasure, interviewees regard English teachers as a positive force in encouraging boys to read:

*“English teachers are very valuable. They are champions of books, of writers, of authors... They are very important adults as reading role models and champions”*  
(Interviewee 1)

*“I think that teachers are or should be reading role models. Particularly English teachers - who are seen with books, seen to be enjoying books, passing books on, recommendations, talking to boys about what they're reading”*  
(Interviewee 4)

They can also help to influence other significant adults e.g. parents, by helping parents to realise that boys don't have to be reading “quality” literature all the time:

*“in my discussions with parents at Parents' Evenings for example, I've always stressed the importance...of looking beyond that relatively sort of narrow understanding of what's valuable and understanding, appreciating that there are lots of forms of reading that, as long as they're consistent, are doing many of the things that we believe reading is valuable for”*  
(Interviewee 4)

*“sometimes I fear that parents can have very unrealistic expectations of what their children should be reading or simply believe that children should read what they've read and they might have sort of, they might have battled their way through Mill on the Floss at twelve or something and unfortunately it's just not realistic for their son to do that at this point in his reading development”*  
(Interviewee 4)

Despite the fact that they can sometimes have unrealistic expectations of what their sons should be reading, the critical role of parents in encouraging boys to read was noted by all interviewees:

*“it is really, really important that at home parents are reading...Children see parents reading and that reading is valued”*  
(Interviewee 3)

Fathers are seen as especially vital role models to their sons:

*“At Open Evenings for the 11+ students, I give the parents three tips: Firstly, addressed to the Dads – they are their son's hero – therefore read and be seen to read”*  
(Interviewee 1)

It is adults who are seen as vital in creating a culture where reading is seen as normal, whether at home or at school – thus encouraging boys to regard reading as a regular, pleasurable activity. The school library is seen as part of this. By creating a welcoming atmosphere where reading anything is encouraged, boys can be persuaded to experiment in their reading without censure:

*“Quite happy to let them read series to lead them on in their reading. They can always say no when different books are suggested but I will always persist in offering them”*  
(Interviewee 1)



*“encourage them to read anything that grabs their interest”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“Coming in and getting a book to be reading and your showing interest, which I know you do, in what they're reading”*  
(Interviewee 3)

#### **4.1.4 Overcoming attitude barriers**

In this library therefore, boys' negative attitude was seen to be strongly influenced by two main factors: a negative attitude towards reading in general as an activity to be seen doing - it's either not “cool” or not seen as a worthwhile way to spend time - and a negative view of reading itself, forged by the expectations of what “proper” reading is – whether influenced by English lessons or unrealistic parental expectations.

The best strategy for creating a positive attitude towards reading was seen to be the influence of significant adults in encouraging boys to read anything they like and to foster a culture of reading, both at home and at school.

#### **4.2 Access**

Interviewees were asked about whether there are any barriers to access imposed, however unwittingly, by the school library.

The library itself was seen as a welcoming, friendly part of the school but interviewees did think that there were some aspects of the library that

might prevent boys from leaving with a book. A key theme that emerged was that of choice: the library is very well-stocked and this can sometimes be overwhelming for boys who struggle to know where to start in finding a book so simply give up.

#### **4.2.1 Shelf order**

The library shelves fiction titles by author surname. Interviewees regarded this as being the best option. While there was sympathy with the idea of shelving by genre, it was seen as being problematic:

*“You've got your novels arranged by surname. Which is obviously traditional...Although I'm not necessarily convinced, I think boys like to read within genres quite a lot and I wouldn't necessarily – I think trying to organise a library by genre would be fraught with all kinds of difficulties”*

(Interviewee 4)

*“I think it would very quickly become difficult because authors cross genre and then you – they – might actually miss something and so I think it would fall down actually.”*

(Interviewee 3)

*“How would you classify them?”*

(Interviewee 2)

The OPAC was seen as a possible way to indicate genre:

*“I suppose you could do it with your library search – online catalogue”*

(Interviewee 4)

*“is there any sorting mechanism? ...it might be a starter”*

(Interviewee 3)

In reality, fiction titles are actually keyworded by genre on the OPAC and it is concerning to note that interviewees 3 & 4 had not noticed this.

#### **4.2.2 OPAC**

The library uses Heritage Cirqa from IS Oxford which is accessible from the school VLE (virtual learning environment), Firefly.

Library staff saw no problems with the library's OPAC:

*“The OPAC might be a bit of a barrier to finding things. Certainly, not so much in the case of this library, but in other libraries”*  
(Interviewee 2)

However, others were not so complacent:

*“I mean, my experience of it is it's just not very appealing to me and I don't think – I can't think it'd be very appealing to – it seems very sort of bureaucratic and well, it's a bit cheap-looking”*  
(Interviewee 4)

If non-library staff find it unappealing to use then it is likely to be even less appealing to boys. They use it much less than the librarians – it is interesting to note that Interviewee Two, a librarian, felt that other libraries' OPACs might be a barrier.

#### **4.2.3 Opening hours**

The library is open term-time only from 8am - 5pm (school hours are 9am - 4pm) plus occasional holiday opening in Easter and May half term for the benefit of public examination candidates.

The only critical comment about opening hours was to suggest that the library could open before and after school – which it already does.

#### **4.2.4 Stock Choice**

Stock choice is felt to be good:

*“caters for all interest and all levels of ability as well”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“I don't really think that we are short...if anyone comes and asks you 'have you got this?' and you haven't, you can usually get it. So I think they're jolly lucky to be honest”*  
(Interviewee 3)

The big problem is how to choose from such a wealth of stock:

*“Too much choice”*  
(Interviewee 1)

*“They simply just don't know what to choose from all the wealth that's there”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“where on earth do I begin looking?”*  
(Interviewee 3)

#### **4.2.5 Signage**

It was thought that library signage could be improved. Currently fiction is divided into only two categories: Lower School Reading and Senior School Reading. The use of signs to flag up particular books or authors was recommended as a way to help boys negotiate the shelves:

*“What we could do more of is actually flagging up books that are particularly interesting or that we would particularly recommend. So interesting new titles, books that have won awards, and that would go some way towards combating this thing of going to a shelf and just not knowing what to choose.”*

(Interviewee 2)

#### **4.2.6 E-books**

The library currently has no fiction e-books or e-readers. It was acknowledged that there are currently technological and licensing issues, but there are conflicting views about whether e-books are actually needed for the library. While the Assistant Librarian believes that the library needs to offer e-books:

*“We have seen a drop in book lending in recent years that may or may not be due to e-books – the fact that we don't offer it. We certainly know anecdotally that boys are reading books on kindles or iPads and if we don't offer it in the future I think that's probably, it's going to be, could be a bit of a problem”*

(Interviewee 2)

The Head of Library sees no need:

*“There was a small flurry of kindles and very occasionally they'll say they've got a book “on their kindle”. They come from book-rich environments and their parents can afford kindles so there's no pressure as they are getting e-books from home.”*

(Interviewee 1)

Both library staff are more concerned about devices unlike the non-library staff who see things from a possibly more school-wide perspective. Their view is that every aspect of school life is being focussed on the new VLE, Firefly, and therefore they both see Firefly as

the ideal platform on which to put access to library e-books and think that it could be very popular with boys:

*“if it could be somehow, they could click onto Firefly and read it at home, or onto their device”*  
(Interviewee 3)

*“I'm sure if there were some means by which just simply via Firefly a boy could sort of borrow a book, however that would work then I'm sure, yeah, that would be popular...I mean that I think that if the end result is that someone reads something then you've done your job”*  
(Interviewee 4)

#### **4.2.7 Overcoming barriers to access**

Stock choice in the library is seen as good; the main barriers to access in this library are essentially those of choosing and locating the right book. While some practical suggestions have been made: improving signage and the OPAC, developing a collection of e-books, the most important theme that emerged on how to improve access was that of practical intervention on the part of the library staff. Both librarians gave examples of how they intervene to prevent boys from leaving without a book:

*“if we see a child who's, who looks a bit overwhelmed and doesn't know what to choose, we would go and approach them, perhaps ask them what sort of things they like...what their experience of reading has been...and give them a clue as to, or an idea about what they could possibly choose”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“One time recently a group of boys walked in – they wanted books to read but didn't know where to look. So I colour-coded the boys and told them to pick a book of that colour. The colour enabled*

*them all to make a neutral choice and they all picked books they wouldn't normally choose."*  
(Interviewee 1)

The positive attitude of librarians is acknowledged as valuable by the non-librarians:

*"you're so welcoming...talking about reading and engaging in discussion."*  
(Interviewee 3)

The positive role of library staff in enabling access to books was seen as the crucial element which helps boys to find the right book at the right time.

### **4.3 Promotion**

Having encouraged boys to read and helped them to find the books they want, the next important stage is to develop them as readers and encourage them to read more widely. Questions were asked about how the library promotes reading to the boys. However, it was suggested by interviewees that many students are not actually aware of what the library actually offers. It is a concern that some suggestions made by the non-librarians on how to improve access to the books were things that the library already does. This suggests that the library needs to be more pro-active in raising awareness of the services offered. This means that in addition to promoting wider reading to boys, the library needs to promote its own profile within the school to develop more of a presence throughout the school.

### 4.3.1 Current promotional methods

- **Scaffolded reading schemes**

The library runs scaffolded reading schemes for each year group: year seven – Entry Reading Challenge (ERCs); year eight - Shell Noses in Books (SNIbS); year nine – Pageturners.

The librarians regard the reading schemes as being very successful in encouraging boys to read. Crucially, they are optional; there is no requirement to take part. However, the majority of boys choose to. Each of the schemes requires boys to read things that they wouldn't normally choose and points are awarded. They are tied into the school commendations scheme and the library awards prizes at the end of each year both to boys who have performed highly in the reading challenges and also to forms who have achieved well collectively. They are highly regarded by those teaching staff with forms involved:

*“The effect is huge. Especially as it involves the teachers too...Take the recent example when you invited all the form teachers to bring their classes in for an ERCs session and the Head of Year immediately emailed them all again to encourage them to do so. It's because she's been through it herself and knows it's good”*

*(Interviewee 1)*

*“I think because it's a reward system I think that encourages boys to take out books and read them. They are very swayed by rewards and by winning and competing against each other. So just the very fact perhaps of winning the glory or their form*



*winning the glory – being the best readers – I think that's a big encouragement to read".*  
(Interviewee 2)

The non-librarians were less convinced of their effectiveness and were concerned that only the keen readers did the challenges:

*"Maybe they think, 'oh this is for the clever boys who read' or something like that."*  
(Interviewee 3)

*"I think it's good for the boys who read a lot already, I think it's a bit demoralising for the people who don't...you potentially sort of almost stigmatise those people who are exactly the ones you actually want to encourage to read."*  
(Interviewee 4)

However, this is not borne out by the evidence which shows that the reading challenges have, on average, a participation rate of over 80%. The Head of English describes the challenges as requiring boys to read

*"twenty books or something"*  
(Interviewee 4)

which is not how the challenges work – they involve a wide range of activities, including books, but encompassing podcasts, football magazines and films. It is possibly another case of non-library staff not being fully aware of what the library does and strengthens the argument that the library needs to better promote its existing work in the school.

- **Book clubs**

In recent years there has been an attempt to start up a book group for KS3 boys. The Carnegie shadowing scheme has been used as the framework for this. There have been few takers, but those who have joined, have turned up regularly – bribed by free food:

*“Chocolate! The Carnegie Shadowing Group last year got through lots and lots of food!”*  
(Interviewee 1)

- **Displays and Leaflets**

The library has four display boards around the school, which are changed monthly and used to promote books and authors. These are usually based around themes e.g. genres, historical events, anniversaries, book prizes. The library also produces leaflets on similar themes. No interviewees could provide any evidence as to whether the boys actually take any notice of them, but they are seen as a useful means of promotion:

*“Things like displays, themed displays, can be very useful and helpful. Leaflets that perhaps promote new books and give an idea of what the book is about.”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“We maybe need to do more leaflets.”*  
(Interviewee 1)

- **Author visits**

The library hosts author visits to promote books and reading. These are popular with boys and staff:

*“Author visits are good. Again the teachers are happy to give up their lesson time to send the boys to an author visit we’ve arranged because they know we’ll do it well and it’ll be good.”*  
(Interviewee 1)

It can be seen that the library has a number of practical strategies in place to encourage boys to read and widen their reading. The librarians interviewed suggested areas whereby promotional work could be developed. However, as already noted, the non-librarians were worryingly unaware of some of the work that the library already does but they too had suggestions about how the library could raise its profile and reach more boys.

#### **4.3.2 Raising awareness of the library throughout the school.**

All interviewees suggested that more could be done by the library to promote books and reading to boys. A key theme that emerged was that boys need to know what the library can offer – and perhaps they don't always know:

*“I think one thing that's very important is for a library to make sure that boys know what's there...it's no good storing them or providing them unless boys know how to get them or what is there in the first place...I would say that perhaps your work in getting books into the hands of boys begins before they even enter the library.”*  
(Interviewee 4)

One way to do this was the suggestion that librarians could try going into forms at registration armed with handfuls of books to show them what's new:

*"We could even go out into classes with a handful of new books to show them the latest releases"*  
(Interviewee 2)

The most important area for development was seen to be the library's digital presence. Interviewees thought that there was massive potential for the library to utilise the digital systems already in place: the OPAC (Heritage) and the VLE (Firefly).

- **Reviews**

Heritage has features that are not currently used by the library: a Library News section and the facility for readers to post reviews and ratings. A regular news update was recommended but the possibility of boys adding book reviews was seen as a powerful incentive to encourage boys to read:

*"a book reviewing system whereby they wrote short reviews and you could pass on those reviews by Firefly to kids and say in a sort of bulletin 'this has been reviewed as 5 stars' or something like that. I mean that kind of thing starts before they get into a library."*  
(Interviewee 4)

*"tapping into that enthusiasm boys have for passing on reading recommendations to each other."*  
(Interviewee 4)

If a book is peer reviewed it validates reading as an activity that other boys do and helps to create a culture where reading is normal – the scenario identified by all interviewees as being the best way to encourage reading;

*“if somebody validates – it's ok, it's cool – they will very quickly buy into things...so if somebody or something can start the ball rolling, then it will pick up its momentum.”*  
(Interviewee 3)

It was seen as important that the boys themselves are involved in the promotion of books:

*“maybe they could put on some, feed some recommendations. I think having a student voice can be very powerful in encouraging others. It can be a big turn-off to have someone in authority, a librarian or a teacher, tell them or be seen to be telling them what to do, what to read.”*  
(Interviewee 2)

*“I think online dialogue about books would be good...if it weren't just the librarians, if it were the school community.”*  
(Interviewee 3)

*“tapping into that, without sort of controlling it, tapping into that enthusiasm boys have for passing on reading recommendations to each other, finding out how that can be used to their advantage without sort of leaving adult fingerprints all over it, is, would, be something that could work quite well.”*  
(Interviewee 4)

- **social media**

Using the students themselves to utilise the power of social media was also seen as a possible area of development – again tapping into their

preferred methods of communication but encouraging them to do it themselves.

The library does have a twitter feed but the Head of Library was reluctant to consider adopting any other forms of social media because of the amount of work involved:

*“once it's set up you need to feed the beast...don't want to be too stretched.”*

(Interviewee 1)

However, other interviewees felt it was a useful way forward:

*“Basically we need to find out which, what sort of social media the boys are using the most. But Twitter, that's something we have recently started to do and we just need to develop that and make sure that our audience actually is the boys reading. Our users and not just teachers!”*

(Interviewee 2)

*“these things are part and parcel of that, of the younger generation's way of communicating...needn't be the librarians, maybe it could be sixth formers, sixth formers who like reading. You might set it up but then if it could take on its own momentum.”*

(Interviewee 3)

Interviewees therefore think that, in addition to the methods already used, the best way to promote books and reading to boys in the future would be to embrace boys' love of technology and harness their love of sharing experiences by setting up the means to talk about books and reading online. This could be done by adding the facility to rate and review books and to start up some type of social media forum where

books can be discussed. The most important thing is that it should be driven by the boys, not staff.

#### **4.4 Summary findings**

The data from this case study suggest that interviewees believe that boys are not innately anti-reading, indeed they can be very enthusiastic about it. However, that enthusiasm can tend to diminish as they get older and is affected by a number of factors

- reading is not cool
- reading is not enjoyable
- there are conflicting demands on their time, both social and academic

The key to counteracting these factors is to encourage a culture in which reading is normal and valued, both at home and at school. This can be done by encouraging boys to read whatever they want and by significant adults setting an example.

The main problem with access to fiction is seen as being the issue of choice: how to choose. Improving library signage is seen as a practical way to try and help but the most important factor in helping boys to choose books is the actual expertise and assistance of librarians.

The Library has a number of strategies in place to promote books and reading to boys. In particular the reading challenges are very

successful. However, the library needs to improve its profile within the school to improve awareness of the services it offers. The best way to do this is by raising its online profile and developing facilities for boys to actively promote books themselves.

In the next chapter these findings will be compared with the existing literature on the topic in order to highlight similarities and differences and discuss why these might exist.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The aim of this research was to examine the role of the school library in encouraging boys to read fiction and to consider why this is important. This was done by means of a case study to assess the role of a specific school library in the promotion and provision of fiction to KS3 boys. The case study research examined what methods are used in that specific library to encourage reading and what steps are taken to reduce barriers to reading. To what extent was this research successful?

### **5.1 Statement of results**

That it is important that boys should read was clearly established by the review of the literature: the social and cognitive benefits continue into middle age (Sullivan & Brown, 2014, p.5). The importance of encouraging KS3 boys to read fiction was supported by the evidence of the case study: those interviewed were librarians and teachers and all regarded it as vital. The fact that parents can be overambitious in their expectations of boys' reading, while sometimes in need of a steadying influence, is evidence that parents see it as equally important. Sadly, since the literature review was undertaken, the latest National Reading Survey results have yet again revealed that boys are lagging behind in reading:

While the gap between boys and girls in terms of their enjoyment of reading narrowed between 2011 and 2013, it widened again in 2014.

(Clark, 2015, p.8)

The case study found that the school library has an invaluable role in encouraging KS3 boys to read fiction. It was found that boys can be reluctant to read and the most important way to encourage reading is by fostering a culture in which reading is valued. The main difficulty boys appear to have is in choosing books to read; the most effective tool for helping them choose was found to be a supportive librarian. The services that the library offers were found to be effective in encouraging boys to read but it was found that the library needs to raise awareness of its services and develop its online presence, using the digital platforms already available in the school. It was seen as important that boys be encouraged to be involved in this, in order to bring about positive interaction with books and therefore encourage participation due to peer recommendation. This would help to bring about the “culture of reading” highlighted as vital to improving boys' attitude to reading in the first place.

## **5.2 Were these results as expected?**

These results bear similarity with the issues raised in the Literature Review but with some interesting differences. The majority of the problems faced in encouraging boys to read that were highlighted in the Literature Review were found to be the same in the library studied. However, the case study research suggested quite different reasons for these problems than were suggested by the literature. As a consequence, the solutions suggested to remedy these problems also tended to differ.

### 5.2.1 Attitude

This study agrees with the literature in suggesting that boys can be reluctant to read. Both agree that reading can suffer from an image problem and both link this to boys' perception that reading is not "cool". This supports the latest research into young people's reading habits – in the National Reading Survey 2014 only 35.8% of boys agreed with the statement "reading is cool" and sadly 19.5% "would be embarrassed if my friends saw me read" (Clark, 2015, p.13). The case study findings suggest that the image problem for the boys at this library are linked to the increasing demands of other activities as they get older, including academic work. Other activities (e.g. sport, gaming) are simply seen as more fun than reading; Sullivan's (2009, p.99) assertion that boys are alliterate, not illiterate would appear to be accurate. However, the literature also suggests that boys may find reading difficult (Lancaster, 2012, p.4) and it is this that puts them off. By contrast, in this case, apart from one mention of dyslexia (Interviewee One), difficulties with the act of reading are not considered an issue.

A major theme that emerged from the literature is that boys' reading choices are not valued and that they are more likely to read if allowed to read whatever they want. Boltz (2007, p.16) suggests that boys will read enthusiastically if allowed to read what they want and this also emerged as a key finding from the case study. Interviewees saw this as the main difference between reading for pleasure and reading for English lessons.

That there exists a conflict between reading for pleasure and reading for English lessons was heavily discussed in the literature, but not for this reason of choice of reading material. The literature review suggested rather that this conflict can occur because of the reasons why books are studied in English – to elicit an emotional response (Coles and Hall, 1999, p.87) or to analyse its literary qualities (Boltz, 2007, p.3). The case study found that English lessons and English teachers can be a force for good but that it is very important to separate English reading from reading for pleasure because English reading is prescribed, not self-selecting:

Reading for pleasure is less directed and more exploratory.  
(Interviewee 3)

Although the reason behind the issue differs, this does agree with the view suggested in the literature that boys will read if they can read whatever they want.

An unexpected reason for boys' reluctance to read that emerged from the study was that of unrealistic parental expectations. Interviewees saw this as something of a problem and took every opportunity to persuade parents to let their sons read whatever they want, not what they think they should be reading.

While the literature suggested encouraging boys to read anything they like (e.g. graphic novels) (Boltz, 2007, p.14), a suggestion echoed by this study, practical suggestions included detailed tracking with active intervention and the use of e-readers (Lancaster, 2012, pp.1-7). By contrast, although this study agreed with the former suggestion of allowing boys to read “anything”, tracking and e-readers were barely mentioned. This study had a simple central recommendation – to create a culture where reading is seen as the norm.

### **5.2.2 Access**

Similar issues in accessing fiction were raised by both the literature and the case study and there was agreement as to the solution. The main issue in both cases was ultimately that of how to choose a book. The concerns raised in the literature about lack of choice (e.g. Bates, 2000, pp.163-164) were not an issue in the library studied – the exact opposite was seen to be the case. The difficulty of choosing a book was seen as the main issue. Hembree's (2013, p.62) concerns of students taking the easy option of leaving empty-handed was corroborated in the case study. It was interesting that in the case study, the librarians did not see the OPAC as a barrier but the non-librarians did – implying that it is not as easy for users to negotiate as the librarians think and showing that it is vital to get an “outsider's” view on library services. While the literature detailed successful re-ordering of library shelves by genre (e.g. Shenton, 2006), the case study interviewees did not regard this as necessary or desirable, although they thought it would be helpful on the

OPAC. Adding access to e-books via the school's existing online platforms was seen as a further potentially helpful route to fiction. Despite these differences, the solution is seen to be the same: this research agrees with Spreadbury and Spiller's (1999) suggestion that the crucial element is personal intervention from a librarian:

it seems to be the case when help *is* given, it is effective. (p.20)

Fortunately, unlike some librarians described in the literature, the case study librarians were seen as approachable.

### **5.2.3 Promotion**

The case study confirms the views in the literature that promotion should be an ongoing task and this is borne out by the success of the reading challenges. All the traditional promotional methods suggested in the literature (La Marca, 2005; Spreadbury & Spiller, 1999) do take place e.g. displays and author visits. However, the main theme from the literature is that of promoting the library from within the library – getting students to visit by using the usual methods just mentioned. In the case study, all this is seen as important, but raising the library's profile across the school is seen as even more important. The fact that the non-librarians interviewed suggested that the library do some things that it already does and of which they were simply unaware indicates that the work the library does within its four walls is good but that it needs to make people much more aware. Although the literature suggested that students are reluctant to interact with library social media initiatives

(Randall, 2013, pp.21-22), Bates (2014, pp.70-71) found that linking a reading scheme to a twitter feed improved participation. This is the effect that the suggested utilisation of the school's existing online platforms, Heritage and Firefly, would hopefully have. By encouraging boys to take ownership of the scheme, as suggested, the negative attitude of students to library social media initiatives should be overcome. This then brings the boys' attitude full circle – they themselves are helping to create that reading culture identified as being so vital to encourage KS3 boys to read.

### **5.3 Explanation of differences**

The benefit of a case study as a research method is that it enables the researcher to investigate an issue in context, in great depth. This leads to the drawback that the results are specific to that “case” but has the great benefit of producing a wealth of rich data, shedding light on why certain phenomena can occur. Importantly, no two libraries are the same. The differences between the case study and the literature can, to some extent, be attributed to various factors specific to this library which can be explained by describing the library and its users.

#### **5.3.1 Attitude**

The boys are academically selected from extremely privileged backgrounds and are expected to achieve top academic results leading to places at Oxbridge or Russell Group universities. This might suggest why the demands of academia can start to have an effect by year nine; it

explains the absence of reference to boys who struggle to read; it explains the prevalence of unrealistic parental expectations. It also helps to explain why competing demands on their time become so heavy: there is a strong emphasis in the school on extra-curricular activities to enhance their future UCAS applications. This starts very early in the school as, at this type of school, achieving strings of A\* grades is taken as a given by universities, resulting in this emphasis on extra-curricular evidence. However, this is not the only part of the explanation. As highlighted in the literature, boys often see reading as not “cool” and the same applies to boys at this school, showing that this attitude is irrespective of background or social status. This case study is good evidence that simply providing the best resources is not enough to get boys to read. Something else is needed. The case suggests that in this library, where reading is not seen as difficult, simply unpopular, the answer is to encourage a reading culture. The influence of significant adults can create this. However, the evidence, from both the case study and the literature (Spreadbury & Spiller, 1999, pp.15-20, La Marca, 2005), is that the most important influence is that of a librarian. It is the librarian who encourages boys to read anything they like, unlike English teachers and parents. It is the librarian who provides a space within the school which is dedicated to reading for pleasure.

### **5.3.2 Access**

It is the librarian who controls the stock policy and ensures that there are books that boys want to read. The case study finding that boys' main



problem with accessing books is the dilemma of choice is an issue discussed in the literature but is generally linked to the problem of there being insufficient interesting books (Bates, 2000, p.164), not to there being too many. This difference might again be caused by the nature of the school and its library. The library in which the research took place is extremely well resourced which could explain why the problem with choosing a book is that of too much choice. Library policy is simply to order anything that a pupil requests. By contrast, some aspects of choosing would appear to cross socio-economic boundaries: OPACs are clearly an issue to users (although not librarians).

### **5.3.3 Promotion**

Although the case study library uses many of the traditional promotional methods suggested in the literature, the overwhelming message from the case study is that the library needs to promote its services more widely and extend its influence school-wide using online methods, an idea touched upon in the literature (Bates, 2014, p.70). As the interviewees pointed out – the school has excellent platforms already in existence that could be used for book reviews, library news, e-books, etc. Where e-books are mentioned in the literature it is usually in the context of e-readers rather than e-books to be accessed online. By contrast, e-readers are not used by the case study library although there is limited use of non-fiction e-books accessed via online platforms. This difference might again partly be explained by the affluent nature of the school: it is noted by Interviewee One that boys tend to have their own

devices therefore they are assumed not to be effective as a tool to encourage them to read. There is no novelty factor. However, the tentative use of online platforms may simply be indicative of the rapid pace of change with regard to accessing media: for example, sales of DVDs and CDs are dropping – people are increasingly subscribing to online providers to stream on demand. The same may well be true of e-books – it was recently reported that sales of e-books have plateaued (Trotman, 2015, Campbell, 2015) – although some dispute the figures (Baddeley, 2015, Kerin, 2015). Adding fiction e-books to the existing school online platforms could help to encourage boys to interact more with the library online, from anywhere within the school, which could then lead them to engage with other library services. Digital platforms have become the boys' first port of call for information and so that is where the library needs to strengthen its presence in the school.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The aim of this research is to examine the role of the school library in encouraging boys to read fiction and to consider why this is important. This aim has been met: the appropriateness of a case study to investigate the issue of boys' reading is shown in the depth of insight into the problem revealed by the research. In addition to confirming that the problem of boys' reluctance to read exists, the research was able to provide insight into “why” these issues occur. Barriers to reading, identified from the literature review, have been investigated in the library studied and a clear idea of the methods used to encourage boys to read

fiction has been discovered. This has led to realistic solutions being proposed.

As already stated, the issues revealed in the case with regard to boys and reading are broadly the same as those identified in the literature. The study findings have confirmed that boys tend to be reluctant to read and that this tends to worsen the older they get. Many of the issues highlighted in the literature review have been raised in this case study, however, the reasons for these have differed in some aspects from those in the literature review. Consequently different solutions have been proposed. The reasons for these differences may be partially explained by putting the “case” into context which has shown the influence that socio-economic factors can have.

An important overall finding of this research is one seeming incongruity that is raised in both the literature review and the case study: adults seem to be both part of the problem and part of the solution. Adults telling boys what they should read is a problem; adults creating social media content about books for the boys can be a problem. However, adults can be role models for reading; adults can help create the reading culture; adults (especially librarians) are the catalyst to help overwhelmed boys to find books; adults can set up the digital mechanisms by which boys can then review and rate books to encourage peer participation. The critical point is that adults are a

problem when they are “telling” boys – telling boys what to read.

When adults take a role of support and encouragement but let the boys ultimately choose for themselves, their role becomes a force for good.

This is possibly the most important point to take from this research.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This research had a clear aim: to examine the role of the school library in encouraging boys to read fiction and consider why this is important.

Three objectives were set to achieve this aim:

- To undertake a case study of an independent boys' school library to assess its role in the promotion and provision of fiction to KS3 boys.
- To examine what methods are used to encourage reading and what steps are taken to reduce barriers to reading.
- To compare current practice with the literature and make recommendations based off the findings of the case study.

The research was designed to answer the questions:

- How should the school library encourage KS3 boys to read fiction?
- Why is this important?
- What barriers exist to prevent KS3 boys from reading fiction?

To what extent have these questions been answered? Have the aims and objectives been met?

## **6.2 Review of this research**

A review of the research shows that these aims and objectives have been met: the methodology used provided relevant data about the issues investigated, as explained below.

The literature review confirmed that this was an issue suitable for investigation. The problem of boys' attitude towards reading has been discussed in the literature and some comparison made with that of girls. The themes developed from the literature could be grouped into three main areas: access, attitude and promotion. A major theme which emerged was that boys' failure to read stems largely from their attitude towards reading itself as an activity. However, the majority of the literature concerning encouraging reading for pleasure is non-gender specific which suggested that there was a place for a study focusing specifically on the role of the school library in encouraging boys.

The appropriateness of a case study to investigate the issue of boys' reading is shown in the depth of insight into the problem revealed by the research. In addition to confirming that the problem of boys' reluctance to read exists, the research was able to provide insight into why these issues occur. The use of semi-structured interviews gave the opportunity to question interviewees on the same core issues while providing the flexibility to investigate further where necessary. The results of the research showed that boys can be reluctant to read and that this

reluctance often tends to increase as they age; these findings correlate with the existing literature on the subject. However, this research found some differences in the reasons for this reluctance to read - these differences can be partially attributed to socio-economic factors. This depth of insight meant that realistic solutions to the problem could be proposed. While not dismissing the recommendations commonly made in the literature e.g. author visits, etc., this research suggested a more fundamental need for a “reading culture” in order to influence boys’ entire attitude towards reading. Significant adults i.e. librarians, teachers and parents are critical to the creation and nurturing of this “reading culture”, as are the boys themselves.

These results are clearly specific to the library studied therefore the methods used have been clearly described so to enable another researcher to replicate this study in a different setting. A key lesson learnt from undertaking this research was the importance of clear planning; another researcher replicating this research should have a clear set of guidelines detailing how to undertake a similar study, but would nonetheless be advised to plan each stage carefully. The other essential stage was the piloting of the interview: the importance of this stage is highlighted in the literature and proved to be invaluable. Despite these guidelines, another researcher choosing to replicate this study in another library they should be aware that this study had certain methodological limitations.

### 6.3 Limitations

An obvious limitation of this methodology is that the boys themselves were not interviewed and this study might have been improved by actually asking the boys for their views. This was not possible in this study for reasons explained above in chapter three. However, one benefit of interviewing adults is that the boys are less likely to view the library from an overall school-wide perspective and there is the possibility that the insights gained into the wider whole-school role of the library might not have been forthcoming from the boys. The best option might have been to interview both boys and staff, had that been possible.

The obvious drawback of the case study model is that it cannot easily be generalised and this study is particularly limited as only a single school library was investigated. This study focused on just a single library and, as stated earlier, no two libraries are identical. However, a case study is not intended to be generalised. As stated in chapter three:

case studies are not intended to produce generalizations, they are intended to allow for transferability of findings based on contextual applicability.

(Pickard, 2013, p.109)

For this reason, the context of the library in question has been clearly described so other researchers can evaluate the extent to which this study can shed light on issues faced in their own library.



## **6.4 Recommendations for further research**

The effectiveness of this research could be extended by the same methods being used to evaluate another, similar library to explore whether these issues are the same in libraries of a similar nature. It would increase this study's validity if similar results were replicated in a similar school elsewhere. An area for further research would then be to replicate this study in different types of school library to investigate the extent to which these issues are determined by socio-economic factors.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Ultimately, despite these limitations, the aims and objectives have been met. That it is important that boys read fiction was established by the literature review. The evidence of the case study shows that the school library has an important role in encouraging boys to read fiction. Barriers to reading do exist and would seem to cross socio-economic boundaries. However the causes and subsequent solutions to boys' reluctance to read would appear to differ between libraries, a phenomenon that might to some extent be explained by putting the library into its correct context. The findings of this research have suggested various ideas that can help practitioners to encourage KS3 boys to read fiction. In particular, as already suggested in chapter five, when adults take a role of support and encouragement but let the boys ultimately choose for themselves, their role becomes a force for good. The evidence of this case study would suggest that the most important recommendation to be taken from this research is that the adult best

placed to support and encourage boys to read fiction for pleasure is a qualified school librarian.

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## **Appendices**

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## **Appendix One: Information letter for participants**

### **Qualitative case study to investigate the role of the school library in encouraging key stage three boys to read fiction.**

#### **Information letter for participants**

Dear [Interviewee's name here],

Thank you for taking part in this research project. Please read this page carefully – it contains important information about the nature of the research and your rights as a participant.

Before you consent to be interviewed it is important that you understand:

- why the research is being done
- what it will involve

Please take time to read the following information carefully. If anything I have written below is unclear, or if you would like more information about this research project and what it involves, then please contact me using the contact details below.

**Who is the researcher?** Penelope Davison

**What is the research for?** This research project is being undertaken as part of a Master's Degree in Library & Information Studies from the University of Wales Aberystwyth under the supervision of Dr Anoush Simon.

**Why have I been asked to participate?** You have been purposely chosen as someone with knowledge appropriate to this research.

**What does the research involve?** The research will involve taking part in a semi-structured interview. You will be asked about the role of the school library in encouraging KS3 boys to read fiction. You have the right not to answer any of the questions that you are asked. The interviews will be at a time of your convenience and should last no more than an hour.

**How will the interview data be recorded?** With your permission, the interview will be recorded on an audio recording device. This recording will be used only for this piece of research, and will be used in accordance with UK data protection legislation and the ethical research procedures of Aberystwyth University and the British Educational Research Association. Notes will also be taken by the researcher. The audio recording and the notes will be transcribed into text files.

**What if I'm happy to be interviewed but do not wish to be recorded?** The interview can still take place with the researcher simply

note-taking. You have the right to ask for the recording device to be switched off at any point during the interview.

**How will the data be kept secure?** The recordings and the text files will be kept on two duplicate USB sticks (two in case one becomes damaged). These will be kept securely, and for only as long as necessary to: a) analyse the research data and b) report on the research and its findings. All data will then be deleted from the two USB sticks.

**Will the information I provide be kept confidential?** All the information you give us will be treated confidentially. Both the *conversation* and the *information* you provide will be completely confidential and treated confidentially by the researcher.

**Can I remain anonymous?** The school has given permission for the researcher to undertake this case study provided that both the school and the participants remain anonymous. All interviews will be anonymous and personal data removed at the transcription stage. No individuals will be identified in the results. Any direct quotes included in the report (that is, quotes of the things recorded in the interview), will be used selectively and anonymously (that is, no one will be able to attribute/link the words to you).

**Who will see the case study report?** The report will be submitted to the Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MSc.

**What if I change my mind?** You can choose to withdraw from the research at any time before it is submitted to Aberystwyth University by contacting the researcher or the university. In this case, interview recordings, transcripts, and all records of your involvement in the research will be deleted.

**Who do I contact if I have any concerns or queries?** You can contact me at any time in the following ways: email: [ped10@aber.ac.uk](mailto:ped10@aber.ac.uk); school phone ext: 2178

**What if I don't want to talk to the researcher?** If you have any concerns or queries that you wouldn't feel comfortable sharing with the researcher, you can contact the University at the Department of Information Studies, Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3AS, Wales, UK.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you happy with all of the above, please complete the consent form and return it to me. If you've any further questions, please get in touch.

Thank you in advance for your help,

Penny Davison  
17 March 2015

## Appendix Two: Consent form

### Consent form

**Title of project:** Master's Dissertation: *Qualitative case study to investigate the role of the school library in encouraging key stage three boys to read fiction.*

**Name of researcher:** Penelope Davison

**Project authority:** This research project is being undertaken as part of a Master's Degree in Library & Information Studies from the University of Wales Aberystwyth

**Please  
tick**

I have read and understood the *Information letter for participants* (17.03.15) and the researcher has explained the study to me.

☐

I have had the opportunity to consider this information and ask questions about it and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐

I am aware that I will be asked about my role and attitudes during the course of this study.

☐

I understand that my decision to consent is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason.

☐

I understand that my anonymity will be respected and that none of my personal data (e.g. name, place of work, etc.) will be published or divulged to my employer in any way

☐

I agree that the data I provide may be used by Penelope Davison, within the conditions outlined in the *Information letter for participants*

☐

I agree to the use of any anonymised direct quotes in the report

☐

In case of concern or query I have been given the contact details of the researcher and the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

☐

I consent to participate in this study about the role of the school library in encouraging KS3 boys to read fiction

☐

<b>Name of participant (IN BLOCK LETTERS)</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Name of researcher (IN BLOCK LETTERS)</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

## Appendix Three: Interview guide

### Interview Guide

*Start by noting my name, title of project, pseudonym/role of interviewee, date & time.*

Thanks for agreeing to take part. I'm using an interview guide for these interviews and some may be more relevant to you than others. Please don't feel you have to answer anything that you don't feel comfortable with or qualified to answer.

The whole premise of this research project is that boys are reluctant to read fiction. Do you think this the case? Why?

What do you think puts them off reading?

Some would say that boys read lots but their reading choices are not valued? When you think of boys reading habits, what would you regard as "proper" reading? (depending on response) comics, graphic novels?

How would you describe the difference between the reading required for English lessons and reading for pleasure?

How do you think the one influences the other?

What effect do you think the attitude of others has on boys' reading habits? (For example: teachers, librarians, other adults, peers).

What effect do you think the attitude of library staff has?

What effect do you think the library atmosphere has?

What do you think is the role of the school library in encouraging boys to read fiction?

What barriers do you think school libraries put in the way to prevent boys from reading fiction? i.e. a boy comes to the library wanting a book to read – what might prevent him from leaving with one? (depending on response) shelf order; OPAC; opening hours; stock choice; signage?

Do you think boys and girls see these barriers/problems differently? How?

What do you think the library could do to get rid of these barriers?

Do you think the library should invest in e-books? Why?

If yes, in what format?

Assuming that getting boys into the library is a good thing, what do you think is the best way to encourage them to visit? (depending on response) displays, author visits, other one-off events?

What effect do you think our reading challenges have?

Do you think we should start using more social media? Why? Which ones (blogs, facebook, twitter others?)

Which promotional methods do you think work better for boys?

We've covered a lot of ground? Is there anything else you would like bring up that I've not covered?

Thank you for taking part in this interview

*Note end time.*

## Appendix Four: Example of a coded interview transcript

### *An excerpt from Interview Three with the Head of Learning Support:*

PD: So, getting to the heart of what my diss is about really, what do you think is the overall role of the school library in encouraging the boys to read fiction? I know we've covered that a lot already, but is there anything else you'd want to add?

LS: I suppose I think – having the books available – or if they're not available, saying “well, we can get them for you” - opening doors – rather like, well Amazon do it as a selling technique – if you've enjoyed this, you might like to try... So you're -I've used that image of the opening doors and there's a wealth here - see what there might be – but that's giving them a bit of direction and the more that you can do in terms of generating enthusiasm, interest, excitement – as you do – you have the reading, authors in, competitions and things so lots of things. But I do think it's important, you can't be seen that it's your job alone – you're part of a community and the community's got to buy into that and promote it too. **Codes: P4; A5; AC1**

PD: So, say you sent a boy, specifically to this library now, to get a book to read, what do you think might stop him from actually walking out of the door with a book?

LS: If I sent a young boy, he might be awed by all the big sixth formers in there. Or, there are lots of books, where do I start to look, sort of thing. Even though you've given them an induction. And I think it would be wrong of me to say “go get a book” when you are so well stocked so it's - and that in itself can be [?] - and where on earth do I begin looking? Ooh this has got a nice cover, but the pages, the print's horrid, and so on. That kind of thing, so a bit of direction, if I were sending somebody. But once someone comes through the door, you're welcoming so ... **Codes: A4; A5; AC2; AC3; AC6**

PD: Do you think the way we actually order the books has any effect – because they're currently by author's surname. One thing I've been wondering about is would it be better if we had “crime” or “romance” or “history” - or do you think that has no impact really?

LS: Well, I suppose in one way, say – if I gender stereotype – the boy might go to crime and that would automatically get rid of romance, but I think it would very quickly become difficult because authors cross genre and then you – they – might actually miss something – and so I think it would fall down actually. **Codes: AC3**

PD: There's a lot of flaws in the whole genre-fying argument which you've pretty much hit on: how on earth would you actually do it? What do you do with a romantic historical novel –

LS: That's got some crime and horror!

PD: Yes! So I do think this is the best way to do it but some people out there have done it by genre you see. So I'm asking everybody but everybody's saying keep it like this.

Do you think our opening hours are sufficient?

LS: If you could extend them pre and after school I think it would be great.

**Codes: AC5; AC9**

PD: What about the choice of what we've actually got? The actual stock choice, the range of books that we have. Do you think we've got enough titles that interest the boys?

LS: Yes. I really don't think that we are short. And it seems to me, that if anyone comes and asks "have you got this?" and you haven't – you can usually get it. So I think they're jolly lucky to be honest. **Codes: AC6**

### **Key to codes used in the transcript excerpt:**

- A3** The effect of the attitude of other people on boys' reading
- A4** The effect of the attitude of librarians on boys' reading
- A5** Library atmosphere
- AC1** The role of the school library
- AC2** Barriers to access
- AC3** Shelf order
- AC5** Opening hours
- AC6** Stock choice
- AC9** Overcoming physical barriers
- P4** Promotional methods



## Appendix Five: Example pages of analysis spreadsheet

A6 Overcoming attitude barriers			
Interview		CRA	Ques
1	Kindles can help – they often have a strong preference for electronic gadgets and it can help with the print size. Also the book doesn't look as big because you can't tell its size.	1	2
1	Quite happy to let them read series to lead them on in their reading. They can always say no when different books are suggested but I will always persist in offering them.	3	3
2	So, yeah, we like to see, to encourage them to read anything that grabs their interest.	3	3
1	Sharing makes it social e.g. the book groups we run. It enables sharing opportunities e.g. discussions with students at the library desk.	4	4
1	At Open Evenings for the 11+ students, I give the parents three tips: Firstly, addressed to the Dad's – they are their sons' hero – therefore read and be seen to read. Secondly, read what your children read and discuss it at the dinner table – that makes it quality social interaction. Thirdly, get a public library card as they provide free online access to Britannica and the OED for example. If children are from a book-rich environment, as ours tend to be, books are valued as cultural capital. Public libraries are crucial for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds – access to books and information but also to appropriate adults to guide them too.	6	6
2	well I would hope that we would be encouraging of the boys to read anything. Certainly in the books that we select and put out on displays. We like to push all sorts of books for example graphic novels, non-fiction, and we, we encourage them to read whatever grabs their interest.	8	7
3	I suppose I think ... coming in and getting a book to be reading and your showing interest, which I know you do, in what they're reading. So, if somebody brings a book in you say "oh I've read that, its' great" - that's important. So you're giving your stamp really or what would be equally good, if you haven't read it "let me know what you think when you've read it". But that sort of talking about reading and engaging in discussion and potential discussion – I think it would be good. And I love the way we've got coverage - the booker award, the orange prize has come out – out there – I think they're really good things.	8	7

A6 Overcoming attitude barriers			
2	By promoting...basically getting them to read whatever grabs their interest. Putting new books their way. Perhaps challenging them to read something which they haven't yet tried. Once they've got into the habit of reading. Moving them on from something junior to maybe stretching them to read something a little harder. But generally just encouraging them to read whatever grabs their interest I'd say is the most important thing.	10	9
1	ERCs & SNIbS [Entry Reading Challenge & Shell Noses in Books reading challenge] provide the scaffolding to hang reading off. They are self-selecting – there is no homework – they provide a framework for rewards. I am still amazed, after all my years at the school, that the boys love receiving commendations and winning a lower school tie! Anything to encourage! ERCs and SNIbS provide a way in to reading. They can choose	17	12

### KEY

Interview	Interview number
CRA	Cross Reference Analysis Document page number
Ques	Question number